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House votes, 230-196, to freeze Contra aid

Republicans pledge filibuster in Senate

By Jennifer Spevacek
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The House yesterday voted 230-196 to impose a six-month freeze on aid to the Nicaraguan resistance, and Democratic leaders said it marked the end of congressional support for the rebels.

The moratorium bill now goes to the Senate, where Minority Leader Robert Dole has threatened a filibuster.

If both houses block release of \$40 million in aid to the Contras, President Reagan will veto the legislation. The Democratic leadership concedes it does not have the votes — two-thirds in each house — to override the veto.

Yesterday's vote was meant to "send a message" to Mr. Reagan, the Democratic leaders said.

"This vote will demonstrate to the administration that this will be the last money appropriated for Contra aid," said House Majority Leader Thomas Foley.

But House Minority Leader Robert Michel said the relatively close vote was a positive sign for supporters of the rebels battling Nicaragua's Marxist Sandinista regime.

"I'm very encouraged by the vote," Mr. Michel said. "There were 40 good Democrats willing to oppose their leadership position."

As the first test of support for the rebels in the 100th Congress, the moratorium bill would cut off all further aid and require the administration to account for all previous assistance, including any proceeds diverted from the sale of U.S. arms to Iran.

"The American people have a right to know where this money has gone," said Rep. David Bonior, Michigan Democrat and floor leader for the bill. "The American people are looking to the House of Representatives for leadership on this issue."

But Republicans protested that the moratorium bill was being railroaded through the House as a political exercise.

"The name of the game is politics, not policy," said House Minority Whip Trent Lott. "I do not want to be recorded as handing over Central America to the Soviets."

Rep. Roman Mazzoli of Kentucky, one of a handful of Democrats to

speak against the bill, called the moratorium vote a "hypocritical" move to avoid a straight up-or-down vote on the release of the final \$40 million of the \$100 million in rebel aid approved in Congress last year.

"We're trying to blur, to muddy, to equivocate," Mr. Mazzoli said. "It's unbecoming at best, cynical at worst."

The release of the final \$40 million is considered almost certain. House Democratic leaders acknowledged the moratorium bill was aimed more at setting the stage for congressional consideration of Mr. Reagan's expected \$105 million request for further aid to the rebels later this year.

"The administration must face reality," said House Speaker Jim Wright. "The next phase of any attempt to get further aid for the Contras would have to be passed by both houses."

But Mr. Michel said there was still hope. "There's going to be some second and third thoughts out there," he said. "I'm surely going to continue to press."

If the controversy over the Iran-Contra affair lingers it could pose a problem for future aid, he said. "That part is muddy ... unless it gets cleaned up."

Democrats hailed the vote as clear evidence that the House no longer would support what they called a failed and futile policy in Central America.

"Corruption and incompetence, not inadequate support, have crippled the Contra program," said House Majority Whip Tony Coelho.

Rep. James Traficant, Ohio Democrat, said the Contras had shown that they could not defeat the Sandinistas or hold territory in Nicaragua.

"I seen the [the Contra leadership] sort of like the Three Stooges

of Central America ... whose leadership reads more like a cartoon strip than a blueprint for democracy," Mr. Traficant said.

"I doubt they have overwhelming control of one bordello in Central America."

Supporters of rebel aid said the House vote would send a signal to the world that the United States was an unreliable ally.

"No country can accumulate a record of abandoning friends and expect to keep the respect and trust of others," said Rep. Jack Kemp, New York Republican.

Several lawmakers, drawing comparisons between the results of withdrawing U.S. support for the Contras and the Bay of Pigs, said House Democrats were ignoring history and abandoning a policy of challenging Soviet expansionism.

"I'm deeply disappointed with the new [Democratic] leadership," said Rep. Dick Cheney of Wyoming, the third-ranking House Republican leader. "This was kind of their first test ... and it's clear that they failed it."

Mr. Cheney said a still-classified House Intelligence Committee audit of the \$60 million sent to the rebels this year will show that all the money can be accounted for.

Rep. Dan Lungren, California Republican, called the vote a "legislative farce."

"During the American Revolutionary War, did Lafayette send a delegation of accountants? Are we going to stop communism with the General Accounting Office? Don't be silly," he said.

Rep. Henry Hyde, Illinois Republican, said House Democrats were

responsible for any problem in accounting for the \$27 million in 1985 humanitarian aid because they barred the CIA and the Defense Department from participating.

"You put leg irons around the program and then you complain because it can't walk," Mr. Hyde said.

Calling the the moratorium bill "a cellophane fig leaf ... something you ought to be ashamed of," Mr. Hyde said: "This is about welshing on a promise to the campesinos who put their lives on the line because they were foolish enough to count on us."